

TO: Governor
FROM: John Arledge
DATE: March 30, 2004
SUBJECT: Education Summit
CC: Charlie Williams

We have talked a couple of times about an education strategy for after this Session. I wanted to take a moment to flesh out some of my thoughts on this subject for your review.

I think it would be smart for us to consider holding an Education Summit later this year similar to what we did for the "Job Creation Summit." This would be helpful for several reasons:

- Even with success on other fronts, the Administration will probably suffer a hit in polling numbers among some white swing voters at the end of this Session because of bad news concerning education. A summit would help us shore up some of those numbers and change the dynamics of the education debate before labels develop. If we get stuck with an anti-education reputation early in the term it will be hard to reverse in time for reelection. Education will be any opponent's key attack message to white voters.

- There is a certain “Nixon Goes to China” aspect to a conservative Republican Governor holding an Education Summit. It goes against conventional wisdom for a pro-business, budget-cutter to focus on public education and use his contacts to address the issue. This makes your case for reform stronger.
- Any education reform ideas proposed by this Administration would likely be rejected if proposed exclusively to the education establishment in the executive and legislative branches in private. Such a high profile setting would allow us to go over the heads of the education bureaucrats and directly to parents for popular approval.

An Education Summit should have several ingredients:

- Call in right-of-center education leaders from across the country to speak on successful reform initiatives in other states. Let former North Carolina Governor Jim Hunt coordinate.
- Ask several conservative education think tanks to join forces, make Mississippi a study project for reform, and submit an action plan.
- Invite Education Secretary Paige to keynote the event.
- Leave the education bureaucracy out of the Summit entirely. Invite only Dr. Johnson and legislators.

- Ask each school district to send one teacher representative. This would keep the focus on teachers, not administrators.
- Consider asking Governor William Winter and Jack Reed to moderate the event.
- Heavily involve the state media – give in-kind sponsorship opportunities to *The Clarion-Ledger* and *The NEMS Daily Journal*.
- Use break out sessions to examine key reform areas.

Months after the Summit, we should consider announcing an Education Reform Act and call a special session to pass it. The Act should avoid any funding issues and strictly address structural reform in Mississippi's public schools. By keeping funding out of the discussion we neuter much of the opposition's strongest arguments, forcing them to defend the bureaucracy and status quo. The opposition's usual tactic is to make all education debates about funding. This new format would remove their rhetorical advantage and serve as a strong platform for your education ideas.

The reason I am suggesting a special session is because it would highlight education as a high priority for you. It will also become difficult to find proper timing for passing an education package during a regular session. This session will be dominated by budget issues -- as will next session. The 2007 election year

session will be risk-averse and uneventful -- as are most election year sessions. That leaves only the 2006 Session -- and that may be too late to build our education credentials before reelection.

The passage of an education package would be the last piece of a strong reelection message:

- Pulled the State out of a \$700 million budget hole - with no tax increases
- Saved \$XXX million in taxpayer dollars through "Operation: Streamline" measures.
- Created XX,XXX new jobs since January 2004.
- Passed significant tort reform
- Landed a major economic development project
- Passed an Education Reform Act

Regardless of what you ultimately decide, we do need to consider some kind of long range planning. This year alone we have the potential to have a tort reform special session, an ag/rural conference, an Education Summit and a national election. This makes for a message overload.